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DOI:

[10.1080/00071005.2014.929632](https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2014.929632)

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Document Version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Citation for published version (Harvard):

Cooke, S & Carr, D 2014, 'Virtue, practical wisdom and character in teaching', *British Journal of Educational Studies*, vol. 62, no. 2, pp. 91-110. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2014.929632>

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UK



British Journal of Educational Studies

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rbje20>

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Published online: 26 Jun 2014.

To cite this article: Sandra Cooke & David Carr (2014) Virtue, Practical Wisdom and Character in Teaching, British Journal of Educational Studies, 62:2, 91-110, DOI: [10.1080/00071005.2014.929632](https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2014.929632)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2014.929632>

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VIRTUE, PRACTICAL WISDOM AND CHARACTER IN TEACHING

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ABSTRACT: Recent reflection on the professional knowledge of teachers has been marked by a shift away from more reductive competence and skill-focused models of teaching towards a view of teacher expertise as involving complex context-sensitive deliberation and judgement. Much of this shift has been inspired by an Aristotelian conception of practical wisdom (phronesis) also linked by Aristotle to the development of virtue and character. This has in turn led recent educational philosophers and theorists – inspired by latter-day developments in virtue ethics and virtue epistemology – to investigate the contribution of various forms of virtue to the effective practice of teaching. In this light, the present paper undertakes further exploration of the logical geography of virtue, character and practical deliberation in teaching.

Keywords: phronesis, teaching, virtue, character, practical deliberation

1. VIRTUE ETHICS AND TEACHING

This paper aims to explore the place of virtue, practical wisdom and character in any satisfactory understanding of good teaching. Much ink has recently been spilt over the question of the nature of professional knowledge and expertise in teaching and other fields. In this regard, a former techno-rationalist conception of effective teaching as the cultivation of repertoires of technical skill or ‘competence’ (Moore, 2004) has largely been overtaken – at least in professional theorising – by a more complex view of teaching as ‘reflective practice’ that requires flexible and sensitive judgement in context-variable professional circumstances (Kinsella, 2012; Sanger and Osguthorpe, 2011). Further to this emphasis on reflection – which may anyway have been of partly Aristotelian inspiration – educational philosophers and theorists have been much drawn to Aristotle’s conception of phronesis or ‘practical wisdom’ as a model for context-sensitive professional deliberation and judgement. Indeed, two features of Aristotle’s phronesis resonate with latter-day conceptions of professional practice in general, and teaching in particular. First, bearing in mind the generally agreed ethical or moral character of much professional teacher and other deliberation (Bullough, 2011; Pring, 2001), phronesis is a form of inherently moral wisdom or judgement. Secondly, however, considering that teaching and other

professional activities may seem to call for character traits such as honesty, self-control, fairness, compassion and patience (Carr, 2007), Aristotle takes *phronesis* to be directly concerned with the cultivation of virtues of moral character.

That said, there is as yet no agreed or settled view of concepts of practical wisdom, character and virtue or about their general place in professional ethics and/or in the particular professional practice of teaching (Ellett, 2012). Indeed, it is first worth noting that – excepting some cases – the foremost virtue-ethical influence on educational theorising to date has probably been that of the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre (2007), who has developed a very distinctive – albeit unorthodox – conception of the virtues of practical deliberation as required to sustain what he calls (social) ‘practices’. Contrary to this recent MacIntyrean drift, this paper argues that such construal of practical wisdom and virtue is not particularly helpful for understanding the place of virtues of character in teacher and other professional life. From this viewpoint, we suggest it may be better to look in a more mainstream Aristotelian direction for clear understanding of notions of virtue, character and practical judgement in teaching than in that favoured by contemporary educational MacIntyreans.

Briefly, it seems that the main trouble with educational application of MacIntyre’s conception of virtue and practical wisdom is that it has encouraged a view of teaching (despite MacIntyre’s own reservations about regarding teaching as, in his sense, a practice) as a relatively self-contained body of intuitive practitioner wisdom or expertise that is significantly insulated from wider professional concerns and/or theoretical, technical or evidence-based enquiries. Thus, we would argue that while the professional practice of teaching – or, for that matter, any other professional practice – cannot be fully understood without reference to the moral virtues of Aristotle’s *phronesis* or practical wisdom, these are far from co-extensive with MacIntyrean or other (professional) practice-sustaining capacities. On the contrary, the virtues of *phronesis* or moral wisdom are wider than and not reducible to those required to sustain MacIntyrean practice; and the virtues required to sustain professional practice – in a MacIntyrean or any other sense – are wider than and not reducible to those of *phronesis* or moral wisdom.

The main objectives of this paper are: to clarify, via some critique of MacIntyre’s practice-oriented notion of practical wisdom, the place and role in teaching of virtue in general, and moral virtue in particular – and, by implication, in other professional enterprises; to re-affirm the respects in which (Aristotelian) moral virtues of practical wisdom are justified by, dependent on or connected to other sources or forms of objective practice-independent theoretical or normative human enquiry; to shed further light on the diverse ways in which practical wisdom may operate in different professional contexts; to distinguish the moral virtues and judgements of practical wisdom from those (epistemic, technical and other) virtues or excellences that are more obviously definitive of the goals and purposes of diverse professional practices; and, by way of conclusion, to say something about the overall moral and professional significance and implications of these virtue ethical analyses and distinctions.

2. THE CASE FOR PRACTICAL WISDOM AND VIRTUE IN TEACHING

First, however, let us consider a classroom teacher faced with a fairly common problem in her teaching of drama to a group of pupils. Two pupils at the back of the class constantly chat to each other, giggling and interrupting the learning of other classmates. This is the sort of disruptive, off-task behaviour often cited as a serious issue for teachers (Gu and Day, 2013), since it is generally more prevalent and wearing than the rarer but more highly publicised incidents of violence by more seriously disaffected pupils. There are at least three reasons for finding such conduct educationally untoward. First, the pupils themselves are not learning what the teacher intends them to learn – so their own education is compromised. Secondly, the pupils' behaviour serves to distract other pupils, thus interfering with the learning and understanding of others. Thirdly, the teacher has to divert energies and resources away from the main pedagogical business of the day and is thus hindered in the pursuit and achievement of her educational aims – unless, of course, we might consider dealing with such disruption as among such educational aims. In all events, how should a teacher resolve this sort of issue, by what standards, principles or other guidance might any such resolution be judged, and what part, if any, might practical wisdom or other personal or professional capacities play in arriving at appropriate judgement?

Despite the commonplace character of this episode, it has complex theoretical, practical and professional dimensions and implications. To begin with, it occurs within a formal space – the classroom – which is governed by both national and school policies (Lovatt, 2010; Ozolinš, 2010). So, from a disciplinary viewpoint, some options that might once have been available to teachers (such as corporal punishment) would be professionally ruled out – not just as illegal but as at odds with any decent or civilised conception of education – and others (such as suspension or exclusion) may be against school policy. Moreover, above and beyond national, local authority or school policies, the more particular culture and social context of the school may also limit the options that a teacher may believe are available to her. Yet more particularly, she will need to draw upon knowledge of the pupils concerned, as well as of other pupils in the classroom. Knowledge of the individual pupils themselves and/or of what else is influencing their lives – particularly of what familial or other pressures they are under – is also likely to have a bearing on how to respond in the circumstances.

The curricular stage at which the lesson occurs may also need to be taken into account: for example, whether the lesson is the first of a module or close to an examination. Again, if there are other adults in the classroom, more options may be available to the teacher than if she is on her own. Further, although not least, the character, personality and/or 'philosophy' of teaching – or the career stage or extent of previous experience – of the teacher is likely to influence her judgements (Sanger and Osguthorpe, 2011; Sockett and LePage, 2002). This

indicates well enough that teachers do need to acquire capacities for fine context-dependent judgement in such circumstances as well as the qualities of character that Aristotle regarded as presupposed to such judgement (Campbell, 2008, 2011). But now, what general conception of education and teaching as a profession, or of the virtues, values and standards of good practice, might therefore guide the new – or more experienced – teacher in the formation of good judgements in these or other trying circumstances?

3. THE VIRTUES OF TEACHING IN MACINTYREAN ‘PRACTICE’

Certainly, it seems well in line with common usage to describe the teacher just depicted as engaged in a ‘practice’ – namely, the professional practice and employment of teaching. It also seems proper to characterise the defining goals and issues of such practice or employment in moral terms – to be concerned with determining what is best in terms of the short-term and long-term flourishing of pupils – and also fairly clear that teachers require a range of (moral) virtues of character, such as honesty, self-control, patience, fairness or firmness, in order to do their job well. Moreover, it seems to be practice of this sort that educational philosophers have recently sought to illuminate by appeal to MacIntyre’s notion of practice in his widely influential work *After Virtue* (MacIntyre, 2007). There, in the name of a virtue ethics of Aristotelian temper, MacIntyre has developed a neo-idealist or social constructivist conception of practical wisdom and virtue (owing much also to Hegel and Marx) as qualities or capacities precisely required to sustain what he calls ‘practices’, a term that covers a wide range of human cultural and professional endeavours (such as medicine, law, architecture, musical composition and/or performance and particular sports). He maintains that a practice enshrines goods internal to and definitive of that practice and recognised as such by those who engage in it. The ‘standards of excellence and obedience of rules’ are defined and accepted by practitioners (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 190) who continue the history and traditions of the practice. In short, MacIntyre’s concept of virtue – his key claim to inclusion in the (Aristotelian) virtue ethical tradition – is of a deliberative capacity or reflective disposition apt for the promotion of a social (professional or other) practice.

There are undoubtedly definitional problems about MacIntyre’s rather loose notion of a practice, and (somewhat ironically) much of the recent debate about teaching as a professional practice has raged between followers of MacIntyre, who wish to construe teaching as a MacIntyrean practice, and MacIntyre himself, who has claimed – apparently on the grounds that episodes of teaching can only really be regarded as a part of or means to the promotion of practices – that it should *not* be so construed (see MacIntyre and Dunne, 2002). Still, leaving aside both the problem of defining MacIntyre’s ‘practice’ (see Higgins, 2010) and his own reservations about teaching falling under this title, being a teacher – at least in the role of qualified employee of some system of schooling – might fit the profile of this more straightforward sense of professional practice well enough

for present purposes. In this light, one might also regard the virtues engendered by the exercise of practical deliberation and judgement in teaching or other professional contexts as the capacities or dispositions required to sustain the internal goods of such enterprises. Indeed, notwithstanding recent controversies – between Dunne, MacIntyre and others – about whether the practices of education and teaching can be said to have internal goods, it seems fairly obvious that there are such on our simplified (non-MacIntyrean) conception of practice. (For a more expansive exploration of the internal goods of education and teaching – with which we would have some qualified sympathy – see Hogan [2011].) In short, on the present view, whereas general medical practitioners would or should be committed to sustaining the medical goods of human healing and disease prevention, and lawyers those of due process, the main goal of professional practitioners of teaching would be to promote various goods of intrinsically and extrinsically worthwhile – that is, personally formative and instrumentally useful human – learning. However, we now need to ask about the precise contribution of Aristotelian or MacIntyrean capacities, judgements or virtues of practical wisdom to such promotion.

In so doing, however, we immediately encounter a significant uncertainty or ambiguity about the MacIntyrean claim that virtues are required to sustain his various social practices. For, if MacIntyre means by virtues the familiar moral dispositions of Aristotelian tradition – as we may be entitled to assume – we might first ask whether the capacity to sustain professional or other social practices is definitive of virtue. Thus, for example, if we may fairly suppose that the teacher in our vignette needs to acquire a range of familiar moral virtues – such as patience, fairness, sympathy, self-control and courage – is it the point that these would count as virtues *only* in this or similar contexts? For even if the teacher needs to express or exercise patience in a special (educational) way in her particular professional context, it would seem odd to regard virtues as such as so defined. On the other hand, if we understand the claim to mean that such virtues are *some* of the capacities a teacher might need to promote her practice, it seems no less odd to suppose that *all* she might need is such virtues, or that good practice might be exclusively defined by reference to moral virtues and/or the associated Aristotelian capacity for phronesis or practical wisdom. At this point, we might ask why it seems at all compelling to suppose that virtues – at least as these are commonly understood in an ethical tradition harking back at least to Aristotle – are the primary means to the pursuit or promotion of professional practices such as (arguably) teaching.

As noticed earlier, there would seem to be three main reasons why educationalists have been drawn to the idea that teaching is a MacIntyrean practice sustained by MacIntyrean virtues. The first is the fairly well-rehearsed point that in so far as a practical enterprise such as teaching seems to require flexible and adaptable context-sensitive judgement in complex and ever-changing circumstances, it would also appear to defy reduction to any simple or unexceptionable set of rules or prescriptions, or to the mastery of a pre-specifiable repertoire of

technical competences. It is also worth re-emphasising that this conception of practical deliberation is sufficiently close to Aristotle's (1941) account of *phronesis* or practical wisdom in 'Nicomachean Ethics' for it to have inspired or served as a model for much modern-day theorising about professional practice in teaching and elsewhere (see, especially, Dunne, 1997, 2003).

From here, it is a relatively short step to the second and third main reasons for highlighting virtues in practices. For, in the second place, Aristotle explicitly relates practical wisdom – a point that has sometimes been missed in recent neo-Aristotelian work of reflective practice – to moral virtue: indeed, the main purpose of practical wisdom for Aristotle is not so much right action (although this is an important aim) but the cultivation of good or virtuous character. Moreover, our teaching snapshot would also seem to support the view that such virtues as honesty, fairness and patience – as embodiments or expressions of good judgement – are indeed required by classroom teachers. In the third place, however, it seems hard to deny that teaching as a professional practice is a moral enterprise to which ethical questions about human well-being and flourishing are evidently central. All this said, there are some dangers in conflating or running these far from identical points together, as it seems they have been run together in recent accounts of teaching as a practice.

4. MACINTYRE'S VIRTUES AND PRACTICES: THE MORAL PROBLEM

On the basis of our example of the teacher taxed with discerning what best to do in circumstances of classroom disruption, we may readily agree that the problem for the professional practitioner should not only be that of how to pursue the narrower institutional objective of achieving this or that pedagogical or curricular goal – although this, to be sure, may be a locally significant dimension of the problem – but the broader one of how to promote the moral and material flourishing of all concerned (pupils, the school and the teacher herself) even in the particular circumstance. In short, the objective of any 'professionally extended' teacher – if this means, as it should, more than simply a technically efficient or competent teacher – is to be just, fair, resolute, self-controlled, compassionate and so on for a range of moral virtues. However, it should be no less clear these are not dispositions or capacities required to sustain some local professional or other practice; they are virtues required to sustain any morally serious human endeavour. In this respect, there seems to be something untoward about MacIntyre's account of virtues as tailored to the promotion of particular (social or institutional) practices.

In this respect, MacIntyre's account of virtue is certainly at odds with the key condition for a moral virtue of the mainstream (Aristotelian) virtue ethical tradition – or, for that matter, of such other great moral traditions as deontology and utilitarianism – that moral virtues should not only promote the interests of particular practices, but the flourishing of human life and association as such (see Kristjánsson, 2007, 157–73). On this view, the teacher in our example needs the

Aristotelian capacity of phronesis or practical deliberation and judgement, not merely to solve a local curricular or pedagogical problem but – no less than practitioners of other professions, trades, services, arts and crafts – to acquire the moral virtues of honesty, fair dealing, self-control, steadfastness and benevolence needed to sustain any worthwhile human endeavour. To be sure, it could be said that what here goes for any serious human enterprise as such might apply especially to the activity of teaching, since teaching itself – and this might perhaps underlie MacIntyre's suspicion or intuition that teaching does not sit well with his definition of a practice – is arguably woven into the very fabric of moral association (Carr, 2003a). Thus, it is not only teachers who teach – for good or ill – but any and all human agents who are capable of entering into professional, recreational or other association with others of their kind. From this perspective, teaching is itself a form of human association of inherent and inevitable moral significance or import.

In this regard, however, the general thesis of MacIntyre's (2007) *After Virtue* that modern ethics and moral practice is a disinherited rag-bag of fundamentally fragmented and incommensurable rival moral traditions between which there can be no neutral arbitration – a thesis that is also given explicit educational application in his claim that schools cannot teach a common moral tradition and should therefore severally promote rival ones (MacIntyre, 1999) – threatens a dangerous moral relativism that is not easily dispelled by his neo-Hegelian appeal to a dialectic of the synthesis of thesis and antithesis. Surely, some moral traditions and attitudes – of, say, slavery, misogyny and homophobia – are unjust and wrong, and therefore quite unsusceptible to rational 'synthesis' with traditions that simply condemn such attitudes and practices. In that case, the key problem of MacIntyre's account lies not only with his theoretically loose notion of practice, but with his general anti-realist or non-naturalist reconstruction of the linked Aristotelian ideas of practical wisdom and virtue. Thus, notwithstanding that recent educational philosophers (with again some exceptions) have widely taken MacIntyre's work to be more or less synonymous with contemporary virtue ethics, it would seem that he departs significantly and dramatically from the moral objectivist or naturalist mainstream of Aristotelian (and/or Thomist) moral theory.

5. PRACTICAL AND OTHER WISDOM IN PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

All the same, for MacIntyre and his educational followers a professional or other practice would appear to be a local analogue or microcosm of a 'rival' ethical tradition. The idea seems to be that the practical wisdom and judgement of a profession, craft or trade can only be understood in terms of an extended, largely interpersonal and social, history of practical engagement with such human concerns as building cathedrals, composing music or healing the sick – or, perhaps, passing on collective wisdom or values through education or teaching. However, this also suggests that the reasons for action that hold good in such practices are in a significant sense quite internal to them and cannot be well

understood by non-practising outsiders. One has to be initiated into the mysteries of the practice in order to understand how it operates and, at least on some recent versions of this view, there seems to be little or no outsider access to the 'rules of the game'. Indeed, for MacIntyreans this seems to be one of the hallmarks of thinking about moral endeavour virtue ethically rather than in terms of such rule-based ethical systems as deontology or consequentialism. But while one may well accept the MacIntyrean account of the social history of practices – for surely practices could hardly have emerged except by virtue of some such social history – why should we be drawn to conceiving the wisdom and judgement of such practices in such an insular way? There would appear to be two main reasons for such general drift in MacIntyrean virtue ethics – neither of which, however, seems compellingly virtue ethical.

The first of these reasons undoubtedly rests on the claim that practices are not apt for any kind of theoretical underpinning or input. Indeed, this notion may appear to have some warrant in Aristotle (1941), who clearly distinguishes practical from theoretical reason in 'Nicomachean Ethics'. But this idea is also powerfully reinforced by more recent self-styled educational 'post-foundationalists', who – drawing on an amalgam of MacIntyre and 'post-empiricist' philosophy of science – claim there can be no 'objective' practice-external evidence that might serve to ground human practices (Carr, 1997, 2006) precisely, that such practices can only be justified internally. But secondly, this view is compounded yet further by the idea – also commonly justified by appeal to Aristotle – that in so far as the judgements of practical wisdom are radically conditioned by and/or addressed to particular context-bound circumstances and considerations, there can be no codifiable principles of procedure: in short, there cannot be – in terms of the phrase used above – any rules of the game. From this viewpoint, in so far as the deliberation and judgement of practice is not only indexed to local concerns, but inherently a-theoretical, it could only be a matter of the intuitive craft expertise of seasoned practitioners. So, again on some influential educational applications of this idea, there can be no objective practice-independent evidence for right or appropriate conduct in contexts of teaching, with regard to which the word of local 'expert' practitioners must always be final (Carr, 1997, 2006).

However, whatever the plausibility of this general drift – and it is the present view that it has little – one should here say that it has little or no warrant or support in the virtue ethics of Aristotle. To begin with, while Aristotle clearly does hold that practical judgements require attention to the particular contingencies of context in which such judgements are made, he no less clearly insists – even in the realm of moral discourse – that there are universally true judgements, such as that murder, theft and adultery are always wrong. Indeed – even in the moral sphere – there is clearly much confusion in the modern ethical 'particularist' view (see Dancy, 2004; Hooker and Little, 2001) that the contextual character of particular moral judgements rules out moral generalities or universals: the fact that what counts as the virtue of courage here (confronting a troublesome pupil) may not count as courage there (overlooking provocation

when it is not worth rising to it) does not mean that courage (or its value) is only contextually definable, but only that one needs to reflect carefully on how courage might best be exhibited in this or that context (Carr, 2003a, 2003b).

But likewise, while Aristotle does distinguish practical moral wisdom from theoretical enquiry and technical deliberation, it is no less clear that he does not take the former to be entirely independent of the latter – or, worse still, hold that value judgements belong to a separate and distinct world from that of facts. On the contrary, Aristotle is an ethical naturalist for whom moral virtues are objectively conducive to the well-being of human beings as naturally evolved creatures – for which, indeed, contemporary positive psychologists have recently claimed to find much cross-cultural evidential support (see, for example, Peterson and Seligman, 2004; Seligman, 2002, 2011; Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). So, despite the context-bound nature of particular moral judgement, there can be no doubt either that there are general ethical truths for Aristotle or that the particular judgements of practical wisdom may often need to be informed or supported by theoretical, normative and other sorts of human enquiry. Moreover, what here goes for moral wisdom and judgement must go even more so for most other judgements of successful practice: there are evidently rules of the game – in football, medicine, painting, banking or teaching – that are clearly presupposed to the successful practice of such endeavours, and the progress and/or efficacy of such practices is no less clearly often accountable to or justified on objective theoretical, normative, empirical or other grounds.

All of this, moreover, is of the very highest consequence for sound reflection on teaching as a professional endeavour – or, for that matter, the professional practice of any other occupation. For the idea that MacIntyrean practices constitute hived off spheres of practical reason that call for the exercise of domain-specific deliberations and judgements may suggest not only that virtues have – in the spirit of rival traditions – local origins and value, but that all professionally relevant virtues and capacities fall broadly within the scope of some such rationally autonomous Aristotelian *phronesis*, practical wisdom or moral virtue. As we shall see in the next sections, however, this view does not bear serious scrutiny. In short, one significant problem of recent educational appropriation of the ethical theory of MacIntyre is that it has inclined to blur all-important Aristotelian distinctions between moral and other sorts of virtues, and between moral deliberation and other sorts of deliberation – if not to reduce one to another. Still, we shall defer consideration of this issue until after we have further highlighted some ways in which even moral wisdom and virtue operate differently in teaching from other professions.

6. VARIETIES OF PROFESSIONAL WISDOM AND VIRTUE

In pursuit of this argument, let us now pause for another professional vignette. Consider a junior medical doctor assisting an elderly patient towards the end of a painful terminal illness. The management of pain is becoming increasingly

difficult and the patient requires round-the-clock care. The patient's expressed wish is to remain at home, even though he understands that this may foreshorten his life and make his demise even more painful and (perhaps) lonely. Once again, as in the case of the teacher coping with difficult pupils, there is much about this situation that calls for moral or ethical construal and judgement. The doctor needs to have some understanding of the capabilities and emotional strengths of the patient to judge how able he is to cope alone. A young doctor may not previously have encountered such dilemmas and therefore have much experience to draw upon. She may be worried about her authority to make such decisions and doubt the extent of her competence. Like the teacher in our earlier example, she is faced with a particular situation for which pre-established rules may provide no ready-made solution and for which she needs to develop the practical wisdom and judgement of Aristotelian or other virtue.

Perhaps the most obvious medical requirement here would be empathy, the capacity to understand the situation from the patient's standpoint. However, honesty will also be required to ensure that the patient is fully cognisant of the implications of any decision, prudence to ensure that no inappropriate decision is taken, kindness to care properly for her patient, and persistence to secure the appropriate services if the decision is taken for the patient to remain at home. Thus, as in the case of the teacher, the doctor will need to find the right balance between competing virtues: between, in Aristotelian terms, inappropriate deficits or excesses of honesty or compassion. While part of the role of the doctor is to help patients weigh their personal wishes against their long-term interests, excessive sympathy may lead to a patient making a poor choice without having duly considered its negative consequences. As in the case of the teacher, the development of moral virtues for the wisest possible decisions is required to the end of discerning the best course of action in any particular case.

At this crossroads of the paper, however, four points for further development of the argument are worth making – or re-affirming – with regard to any comparison of this medical vignette with our earlier snapshot of teaching. The first is that the moral virtues apt to be required by doctors, teachers or other professional practitioners may generally be regarded as the same moral virtues – of honesty, fairness, self-control and so on – irrespective of particular professional application. The second point is that, despite this, such cross-contextual virtues may be differently shaped by the diverse requirements of professional context. However, the third – more interesting – point is that differences of professional context have significant consequences for how common moral virtues are esteemed or valued in different professions. But the fourth – yet more interesting – point is that differences of professional context may call for the development and exercise of a variety of virtues that are not always or necessarily moral. In what remains of this section we shall deal briefly with the first two points and at more length with the third. The fourth point, however, will be explored at even greater length in the sections to follow.

In all events, the first point – already fairly well aired – is that the moral virtues which doctors, teachers and/or other professionals are likely to require for good judgement in their professional practice are still the common-or-garden virtues of ordinary across-the-board human association: it is not that they are defined as moral virtues or otherwise by the peculiar contexts of professional practice in which such practitioners happen to practise. All the same, the second point, it should be clear that such virtues may be liable to different expression or application in different occupations or professions. Indeed, as Annas (2011) and others have argued, somewhat different virtues are likely to come to the fore not only in different professions but within the same profession – depending on the specific context or circumstances of practice. While empathy could be the most important virtue for the doctor in the situation described above, it might not be of first priority in the case of a patient dying of blood loss from gunshot wounds in the accident and emergency department – where firmness of purpose might seem more to the point. Likewise, for the teacher, whereas justice as fairness to the whole class may be the priority in most classroom situations, sympathy towards a wayward child may be more in order where he or she is evidently vulnerable and distressed. In short, unsurprisingly, the ordinary moral virtues that teachers, doctors and other professionals may require for honest, fair or courageous practice may be differently shaped by the demands of different professional goals and contexts.

That said, our third point, while such familiar moral virtues as honesty, fairness, self-control and compassion may need to be exhibited or expressed differently in different professional contexts, it would also appear – less obviously – that such practical virtues are also liable to rather different normative evaluation or justification in different professions. For now, we may note a couple of very distinctive ways in which such moral virtues seem apt for different evaluation in teaching from other professions – both of which are related to the fairly obvious role of the teacher as classroom authority and role-model.

Taking the latter first, it should be clear that – as someone in so-called '*loco parentis*' into whose care impressionable young people from earliest years are given – the teacher has traditionally been regarded as some sort of (Aristotelian) example to others (Arthur, 2010). Thus, the conduct of the teacher is likely to have, for good or ill, some formative influence on young people (Chang, 1994). While this should not be overstated, since it is true that young people may ignore or deliberately eschew such influences, the possibility or potential for such influence has conspicuously featured in much professional teacher theorising and policy-making. For example, practices that were probably once quite widespread in education and schooling – such as ridicule or humiliation of students, corporal punishment or smoking in public view – are nowadays largely deplored and proscribed in the theory and policy of professional educational practice. However, while similar forms of conduct are also likely to be deplored and proscribed in such other professions as medical practice, it is important to see that they are not so for the same reasons – since we would not normally hold

doctors accountable for forming or influencing the characters of those in their care. Thus, in the case of the teacher, it is not just that such offending conduct is proscribed because it undermines positive or decent civil association with professional clients, but that such conduct also at least runs the risk of influencing others in adverse ways (Strike and Soltis, 2009).

But, likewise, another significant difference in the way in which virtues of ordinary moral association would appear to enter into the economy of teaching from other professions is that the good teacher clearly needs to be some sort of leader or authority in the classroom. Indeed, this is one of the tasks by which inexperienced teachers are invariably exercised on their first entry into the classroom – precisely the problem of whether they will be able to keep students in order or on task, along with a fear of not being able to do so. It has also been a part of received ‘professional wisdom’ of teacher training institutions and policy-making to regard such authority or management as a part of the *techne* – or repertoire of skills and techniques – that teacher training programmes need to transmit to students: indeed, such pedagogical authority has sometimes been characterised in terms of ‘management skills’ (Elton, 1989).

However, without going to the other extreme of denying that there may be any useful knacks or techniques for avoiding untoward teacher–pupil relations in the classroom, it may be seriously doubted whether such technically reductive thinking about how teachers engender authority and respect in the classroom is entirely on track – and whether those teachers who gain respect and authority do so primarily via the cultivation of management techniques. On the contrary, classroom authority seems more a moral than a technical matter and teachers who have it are more likely so endowed by virtue of such capacities for ordinary moral association as fairness, self-discipline, honesty, compassion and respect for others – which, in turn, are arguably the best ways to engender such qualities in others. But, once again, this would seem to be a reason for cultivating such virtues in the case of teaching that might not seem to apply in quite the same way to medicine, law or other professions.

7. NON-MORAL VIRTUES AND THE DIVERSITY OF INTERNAL GOODS

We may now turn, however, to our fourth point, which is about the respects in which the virtues of professional practices are not anyway entirely reducible to those of MacIntyrean or Aristotelian phronesis or practical wisdom. At an earlier point in this paper, we suggested that just as we cannot adequately understand the virtue of practical wisdom in terms of the MacIntyrean idea of a professional or other practice, so it does not seem reasonable to try to understand a professional practice exclusively in terms of the virtues of moral wisdom. Indeed, the second of these aspirations may only seem compelling in so far as educational MacIntyreans show some inclination, as we have observed, to reduce all professional knowledge and judgement to the particularistic deliberations of practical wisdom and to identify such wisdom with the moral wisdom of Aristotle’s

phronesis – and, to compound mischief, to insulate all such deliberation and judgement from any external or ‘objective’ evidence-based enquiry.

But it should by now be clear that this is to multiply confusions. For example, in the case of the beleaguered teacher earlier depicted, while she may well need to make moral or ethical decisions, not all of them require or are conditioned by the particularities of context: on the contrary, some of them are clearly prescribed by professional principles of moral respect for children’s rights – to equal educational opportunities with others or protection from the harm of physical punishment – which are, although moral, no less theoretically or normatively general, universal and/or grounded in objective evidence than any rules of duty or utility. But equally, the teacher may see fit to address the issue of student inattention by engaging in deliberations about pedagogy – how best here to redirect or re-present the lesson so as to recapture straying attention – that are highly particularistic and open to individual judgement, but by no means obviously ethical or moral.

So a first significant conceptual point is that while the pursuit of formal education or schooling or of other professional practices may require the cultivation of moral virtues in order to serve the general ends of human flourishing – and this may often involve strict virtuous observance of quite general rules – prosecution of the basic aims of such practice may require or call for particularistic or context-dependent knowledge, capacities or other forms of expertise that are not especially in and of themselves ethical or moral. However, what may be even more surprising, given much received wisdom about virtue, is that while some of these professional capacities are not intrinsically ethical or moral, they nevertheless qualify as virtues in the perfectly proper Aristotelian sense of acquired qualities of character apt for promotion of commonly recognised human benefits of the kind that MacIntyre refers to as the ‘internal goods’ of professional and other human practices. In short, as earlier cautioned in this paper, it is of the utmost importance for clear thinking about the place of virtue and (or as) character in teaching and other professional occupations to distinguish, where appropriate, the quite separable notions of virtue, of the moral and of contextually particularistic practical deliberation.

The relevant distinctions here are all clearly set out in Aristotle’s ‘Nicomachean Ethics’. In the sixth book of that work, Aristotle (1941) distinguishes – more than likely as a reaction to the monolithic or all-purpose ‘dialectic’ conception of reason of his teacher Plato – between various modes or forms of reason or deliberation under the generic heading of ‘intellectual virtues’. It is important to be clear that ‘virtue’ as used in this book is a general Greek term (*arête*) for (in this case intellectual) ‘excellence’ or merit, and should not automatically be taken to have the moral and/or characterological associations that it has acquired in modern idiomatic English. In all events, Aristotle distinguishes between five modes of such intellectual excellence – notably scientific (epistemic) knowledge, artistic skill or expertise, practical wisdom, intuitive reason and philosophic wisdom – not all of which have the crucial connections with character that the term virtue has come to acquire in the virtue

ethical tradition. For present purposes, indeed, we may focus on Aristotle's distinctions between just three of these intellectual virtues. First, as noted earlier, he separates theoretical (epistemic) enquiry from practical enquiry on the grounds that whereas it is the purpose of the former to discover knowledge or truth, it is the task of forms of practical reason to be or act correctly. In this regard, however, Aristotle divides *phronesis* or practical wisdom from *techné* or technical skill. For while both of these are importantly concerned with good or effective practice, it is – at least for Aristotle – only the first and not the second of these that concerns the ordering of desires, feelings and appetites that he associates with the development of character.

On the face of it, then, it might seem that it is only the intellectual virtue of practical wisdom, and not the knowledge and skills of theoretical enquiry (*episteme*) or productive skill (*techné*), which is concerned with the development of such virtues of character as honesty, justice, courage, self-control and wisdom: indeed, Aristotle is fairly adamant about the nature of *techné* or skill, which he clearly does not regard – rightly or wrongly – as especially character-forming (Aristotle, 1941, book 6, p. 1027). However, this is not so obviously true of the epistemic virtues that Aristotle clearly does take to involve not just those intellectual abilities apt for sound enquiry or the discernment of truth, but such knowledge and truth-conducive traits, habits and dispositions as honesty, respect for truth, curiosity, open-mindedness, intellectual scrupulousness, scholarly accuracy and so on. For while all of these characteristics could be regarded as human assets in a range of scholarly and other contexts, they need not also be regarded as in the least ethical or *moral*: a person might well be scrupulous and rigorous to the end of forging documents to swindle others. But here we have to clear our minds of the notion that virtues as (generally) advantageous character traits would always have to be morally beneficial – or that the wisdom of *phronesis* is concerned with inherently moral virtues. On the one hand, courage and self-control – which Aristotle does regard as falling within the scope of *phronesis* or practical wisdom – can often be made to serve immoral ends; on the other hand, concern for truth and open-mindedness – which might fall more clearly under Aristotle's heading of epistemic virtues – can also clearly count as moral virtues. With these points in mind, we may now return to the present concern with professional virtues.

As already seen, the various professions are to be distinguished – much in the way of MacIntyre's practices – in terms of their internal goods and goals: as noted, whereas medical practice aims at the promotion of health and legal practice (at least ideally) at protecting civil and human rights, education and teaching aim at the promotion of various intrinsically worthwhile and/or economically or socially valuable knowledge or skills. On the one hand, the doctor of our recent example needs a comprehensive knowledge of medicine to understand both the nature of the ailments she is treating and/or the treatments available, along with knowledge of the after-care support services (realistically) available to patients. On the other hand, the teacher clearly needs more or less (depending on the level

of teaching) comprehensive mastery of the knowledge that she is charged with teaching to children. Perhaps one might think that poor teaching could hardly have quite the same mortal consequences as poor medical care, since the very lives of patients may well hang on the extent or accuracy of a doctor's evidence-based knowledge of diseases and their symptoms. But whilst no one may die from a teacher's failure to teach quadratic equations knowledgeably or effectively, young people's life chances and career prospects could be, and undoubtedly have been, jeopardised by poor, careless or uncommitted teaching.

Moreover, we have observed that while the practical judgements of any human endeavour are not, for Aristotle, reducible to theoretical or evidence-based reason, it does not follow that they cannot be informed or guided by such reason – and there is no reason to think that this is less true of teaching than of other activities. So, whilst it may be true that evidence-based approaches to understanding teaching wisdom and expertise have put the cart before the horse – not least in supposing that such evidence-gathering might somehow determine the formulation of coherent educational aims and purposes (for how then would we know to look for relevant evidence) – it is no less folly to ignore objective evidence that this view of children's learning, or way of teaching, seems more effective or reliable than that one. In short, while there are human aims and purposes that we may know to be humanly worth achieving without needing to seek evidence, it does not follow that we may not need evidence for the best way of achieving them.

But now, the observation that the practical wisdom and judgement of professional life and engagement inevitably implicates or draws on evidence-based or other theoretical enquiry – combined with an earlier point that not all virtues are those of practical wisdom – opens up the prospect that not all the virtues or forms of human excellence that professional practitioners require are actually the moral virtues of practical wisdom and judgement. For while it is no doubt true that acquaintance with this or that body of medical knowledge, pedagogical theory or curriculum content may not in and of itself make one (respectively) a better doctor or teacher, it seems no less hard to deny that professional cultivation of the right sort of motives or attitudes towards theoretical or academic enquiry must be a requirement of good medical practice or teaching. For how might someone even begin to count as a good doctor who had no interest whatsoever in the origins and causes of diseases, or as a good teacher if they had no interest in questions of how children learn or in the subjects they are charged with teaching? Moreover, in the latter case, among the pre-eminent professional virtues that we should want teachers to acquire are surely the virtues of intellectual curiosity, concern for truth, academic integrity, scholarly rigour, open-mindedness and so on. Indeed, these are precisely the epistemic rather than practical (although not also thereby non-moral) professional virtues that – in the specific case of teaching – have been recently highlighted by educational philosopher Hugh Sockett (2012) as constitutive of what he calls 'epistemic presence' in the classroom.

8. THE EDUCATIONAL IMPORTANCE OF EPISTEMIC VIRTUES

In his recent insightful exploration of this idea, Sockett (2012) draws on an important recent development in mainstream epistemology, itself directly inspired by the lately noted Aristotelian distinction between the ‘intellectual virtues’ of *phronesis* (practical wisdom) and *episteme* (epistemic virtue). As seen, where Aristotle takes the former to be concerned with the ordering and regulation of human desires, feelings and appetites in the interests of right moral choices, he takes the latter to be concerned with the cultivation of rational capacities for the discernment of truth. However, in the light of Aristotle’s philosophically radical re-construal of right action as the product of good character (rather than *vice versa*), modern ‘virtue epistemologists’ have aired the possibility of addressing some of the most traditionally vexed issues in the theory of knowledge by appeal to the notion of epistemic virtue as at least necessary if not sufficient for the discernment of knowledge. While some rather extravagant claims in this area seem to have been made on the part of some virtue epistemologists, one significant educational benefit of this recent philosophical turn to epistemic virtue has been the well overdue attention of educational philosophers to the quite central importance of such virtues in understanding the professional purpose and aims of good teaching (see, for example, MacAllister, 2012; Kotzee, 2013).

The recent neglect of attention to the central role of teachers in the promotion of various sorts of intrinsically as well as instrumentally valuable forms of knowledge, understanding and skill – not least given the close attention to this key educational goal of post-World War II analytical philosophers of education – is noteworthy and doubtless merits an entire essay in its own right. Briefly, one may here note that some ‘child-centred’ or ‘radical’ downplaying of the educational value of much academic learning and an educationally influential post-modern revival of an ancient scepticism about the very possibility of objective ‘mind-independent’ knowledge have played their parts. Still, irrespective, there can be no doubt that Aristotle, no less than his illustrious philosophical predecessors and many of his philosophical successors, is committed to philosophical defence of the commonsense view that there is an external mind-independent world of which it is possible to have knowledge – and that it is also not possible to make sense of education and teaching as other than some sort of initiation of learners into received forms and conceptions (albeit fallible) of such (academic, practical, moral and other) knowledge.

In this light, while professional practitioners of all stamps would appear to need the practical wisdom and judgement of ordinary common-or-garden moral virtue – and while one might well be a reasonably (morally) virtuous agent without (at least to any very large degree) possessing epistemic virtues of intellectual curiosity, academic integrity or scholarly rigour – anyone who lacked intellectual curiosity or openness to personal development through this or that form of humanly worthwhile learning would be hardly worth the name of

teacher. Moreover, interestingly, while the intellectual virtues or excellences that go to make up Sockett's 'epistemic presence' are not the moral virtues of mainstream virtue ethics, they would seem to be capacities required to sustain the defining 'internal goods' of education and teaching considered as a professionally distinct MacIntyrean or other practice.

Thus, while the moral virtues of effective practical wisdom and judgement are not especially concerned with pursuit of educational aims such as the acquisition of knowledge or skill, but rather with the cultivation of those qualities of moral character and association of relevance to any (educational or other) endeavour whatsoever, the epistemic virtues have clearly a distinct educational remit with regard to the pursuit of knowledge and learning. Indeed, as a present author has elsewhere put it (in more philosophical jargon), whereas the moral virtues seem to have the 'direction of fit' of agency – so that they are effective or 'successful' when the world conforms to the way that moral agency would desire – the epistemic virtues have more the direction of fit of beliefs that are only successful when they conform to how the world actually is (Carr, 2014; see also Geach, 1976, 96–99). In short, the plain and simple – although not easily achievable – educational aim of rational enquiry and intellectual curiosity, or even of the learning of a skill, is adjustment or adaptation of the mind to what is true and correct, rather than what is solely of the mind's invention.

9. A CONCLUDING CAUTIONARY NOTE ON POTENTIAL SHORTFALL BETWEEN PRACTICAL AND EPISTEMIC VIRTUES

So the defining and time-honoured professional role of the teacher lies with promotion of the characteristic internal goods of education and teaching, which in large part means successful initiation of younger or older people into humanly worthwhile forms of knowledge, skill or other learning (broadly construed) to which cultivation of Sockett's epistemic presence via the epistemic virtues is *sine qua non*. But it is also here crucial to note that the distinction we have (following Aristotle) drawn between the moral virtues of practical wisdom and the excellences of epistemic virtue allows for the possibility that this or that professional educational practice – albeit sincerely directed towards the educational ends of learning worthwhile knowledge and skills on the part of epistemically virtuous teachers – may well fall short of the promotion of general or particular human flourishing in full accordance with practical wisdom and moral virtue.

This, indeed, is where we need to beware once again of the suggestion of some educational MacIntyreans that education or other professional practices might be considered sites of self-contained and self-validating practitioner expertise that are ultimately unaccountable to objective criticism or countervailing evidence. To give a tip-of-the-iceberg example, we know that in relatively recent times sincere, dedicated and epistemically virtuous teachers in British grammar schools set out to provide the best possible academic education for many children who either did not or could not benefit from the kind of education

they provided. We now know, with the practical wisdom and judgement of hindsight, that this was for a variety of reasons relating at least partly perhaps to the uncompromising formality of teaching styles from which children lacking the 'cultural capital' of a certain kind of home background could not readily benefit.

From this viewpoint, it is crucial to see that while epistemic virtues may be a defining or necessary feature of good teaching, they are not sufficient to foster that wider view of human learning as contributory to human flourishing that Aristotelian practical wisdom and judgement – drawing where possible on the best moral and scientific and other theoretical reflection available – requires. In sum, the effective pursuit of education conceived as a distinctive professional practice clearly requires a complex range of interestingly interrelated virtues and other excellences that are perhaps only now – in the wake of some recent exciting developments in mainstream philosophical ethics and epistemology – beginning to be explored in due detail. However, while this paper has sought to make some modest contribution to the logical geography of this complex conceptual terrain, it is clear that much remains to be done by way of further exploration of such complexities.

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